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U.S. Government Paid Social Media Influencers to Promote COVID-19 Vaccines, Records Show

08/27/2026 // Morgan S. Verity // **850** Views



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The federal government funded an \$80 million project that paid 496 social-media influencers to promote Wuhan coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccines, according to a project report obtained by investigative journalist Natalie Winters.

The project, run by Public Good Projects (PGP) and Hispanic Communications Network from September 2021 through April 2022, was 100% funded by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC) and the *Department of Health and Human Services* (HHS). The campaign produced 1,000 posts with a potential reach of 37.2 million people, according to the report, but the document did not name the individual influencers involved.

Federal records indicate the broader effort to push vaccine uptake was part of a much larger taxpayer-funded campaign. HHS released information showing the federal government spent \$1 billion in taxpayer dollars on advertising as part of a media campaign aimed at building vaccine confidence ^[1]. The HHS described this as a "national initiative to increase public confidence in, and uptake of, COVID-19 vaccines while reinforcing basic prevention measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing" ^[1].

Investigation Reveals 57 Influencers and Their Paid Posts

Winters traced Instagram paid-partnership labels, #ad captions, official reposts and archived advertising records to identify 57 accounts connected to campaign content. The posts promoted vaccination for children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers.

Examples include Fabio Dias urging followers to "vaccinate your children" and Angelica Castaneda featuring a vaccinated six-year-old. Other posts offered gift cards for vaccination stories, with one native paid partnership from Erica Marques promoting a \$100 Amazon-card contest.

This influencer campaign was part of a broader government outreach that also included paying media outlets to run pro-vaccine coverage. The Biden administration made direct payments to nearly all major corporate media outlets for a \$1 billion taxpayer-funded outreach campaign designed to push only positive coverage about COVID-19 vaccines and to censor any negative coverage, according to a report by Children's Health Defense ^[2]. The report states that media outlets across the nation failed to disclose the federal government as the source of ads in news reports promoting the shots ^[2].

Campaign Included Real-Time Monitoring to Shape Messages

The project captured 247.7 million public messages from social media platforms, news sites and video sites using keyword searches. Staff reviewed results weekly to identify "trending" or "emerging misinformation," and findings directly informed prompts telling influencers what to include in their captions, which were updated throughout the year. PGP monitored comments for misinformation and supplied influencers with counter-messaging or resources.

This approach mirrored other government efforts to shape public perception. The CDC hired Weber Shandwick, a marketing firm, to create and place unattributed articles on news sites designed to persuade parents of young children and elderly individuals to get flu shots, according to documents obtained by Children's Health Defense ^[3].

The CDC also funded the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists with \$11 million to promote COVID-19 vaccination as "safe and effective" for pregnant women, according to an investigation by attorney Maggie Thorp ^[4]. Records show that the Virality Project, a Stanford University-based effort, suggested government entities could "mix personal stories about the vaccine's benefits with support from data" ^[5].

Disclosures Did Not Identify Federal Government as Source

The recovered ads generally disclosed a relationship with the El Beacon campaign through #ad or paid-partnership labels, but none identified the CDC, HHS or the CDC Foundation as the funding source. The campaign recruited digital volunteers and produced misinformation insights and rebuttal talking points.

Federal records place the work under a \$25.66 million CDC award, but records do not reveal how much was spent specifically on influencers. The CDC has also been accused of tracking

individuals who did not receive the COVID-19 vaccine through a previously unknown surveillance program designed by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, a division of the CDC [6].

Critics argue that these tactics represent a coordinated effort by federal agencies and their partners to manage public opinion by promoting only favorable narratives about the vaccines while suppressing dissenting views. Internal reports indicate the CDC allocated billions of dollars to social media influencers and church leaders to promote vaccines, according to reports [7].

Conclusion: A Pattern of Government Influence Operations

The records paint a picture of a multi-pronged federal effort to shape vaccine messaging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding flowed from the CDC and HHS to influencers, media companies, professional medical organizations, and marketing firms with the stated goal of increasing vaccine uptake.

The use of paid social media influencers who did not disclose the federal government as the ultimate funder raises questions about transparency. Records obtained through FOIA requests show that the government used an "army of Big Biotech's agencies set up to address 'vaccine hesitancy'" that ramped up mass marketing efforts using surveillance, rapid data analysis, media control, and a host of behavior control strategies [8].

The Biden administration's media plans detailed in the records obtained by Judicial Watch revealed an exhaustive, heavily funded and wide-ranging propaganda campaign [9]. These operations, while legal, represented a significant use of taxpayer funds to influence public health decisions through channels that did not always identify their government backing.

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Explainer Infographic

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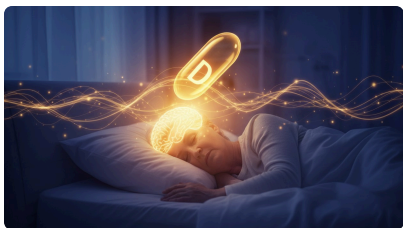
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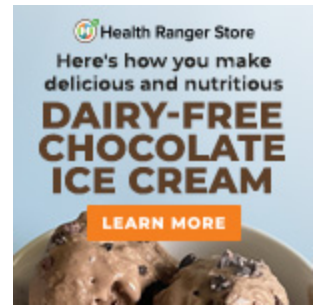
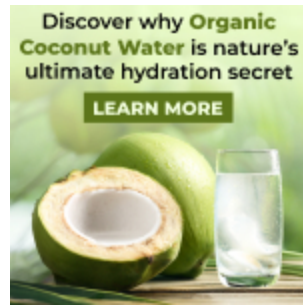
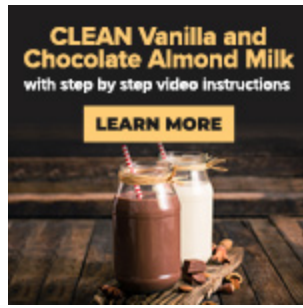
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